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WERNICKE-KORSAKOFF SYNDROME: A COMMON YET ELUSIVE DIAGNOSIS

N. Madeira¹, T. Santos², J.L. Pio-Abreu¹

¹Psychiatric Clinic, Coimbra University Hospital, Coimbra, ²Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, Aveiro District Hospital, Aveiro, Portugal

In 1897, Murawieff proposed that a common cause was responsible for the two syndromes previously described by Carl Wernicke and Sergei Korsakoff. More than 100 years afterwards, the neuropsychiatric nosological entity known as Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome remains one of the most significant, yet under-recognized, consequences of long-term alcohol abuse.

Prompt recognition and treatment of Wernicke's encephalopathy with parenteral thiamine can prevent permanent cognitive impairment, involving severe short-term memory loss - Korsakoff's amnesic syndrome. Such condition has devastating consequences for patients, not infrequently demanding long-term institutionalization.

Based on two clinical vignettes, the authors review some epidemiological, clinical and neuropathological features of Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, besides issues concerning differential diagnosis, treatment and prognosis.